

R 202113Z MAR 09  
FM AMEMBASSY BELMOPAN  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1738

UNCLAS BELMOPAN 000111

FOR DS/IP/WHA, DS/DSS/ITA, WHA/CEN - C. ASHE, WHA/EX/PMO -  
1M. PIPLANI

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: ASEC BH

SUBJECT: BELMOPAN - ANNUAL OSAC CRIME AND SAFETY REPORT

REF: A. (08) BELMOPAN 161

1B. (07) BELMOPAN 643

1C. (07) BELMOPAN 609

1D. (07) BELMOPAN 179

1E. (07) BELMOPAN 118

11. (U) Overall Crime and Safety Situation

Crime throughout Belize continues to remain a problem and has steadily risen over the past two years. Major crimes in Belize (defined as murder, rape, robbery, burglary, theft and carnal knowledge) increased in 2008 by 8.1% from 2007. Most disturbing is that the murder rate within Belize has continued to increase on an annual basis by 5% since 2003. The number of murders in 2008 ) 103 homicides ) has now more than doubled those reported in 2000 (47 homicides) and represents a nationwide murder rate of 34 per 100,000 persons. This, coupled with an understaffed and poorly resourced police force, make the high crime threat in Belize a primary concern of the government. The U.S. Department of State's Consular Information Sheet for Belize (<http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis pa tw/cis/cis 1055.html>) provides a current and accurate overview of the environment.

1A. Crime Threats: vehicle thefts, personal robberies and residential thefts.

Throughout Belize, the number of 2008 reported robberies increased by 3.4%, burglaries by 3.6% and thefts by 12.7% over their 2007 levels. Overall, the total number of reported robberies, burglaries and thefts increased by 7.5% in 2008 over the previous year,s reported numbers (3248 in 2008 vice 3003 in 2007). Criminal perpetrators are also more regularly carrying firearms in the commission of a crime. The number of firearms seized in gun-related crimes in 2008 increased by 33% over 2007 levels (194 in 2008 vice 129 in 2007). This number has steadily increased and returned to the high previously experienced in 2003 (198 firearm seizures).

In years past, if victims cooperated during robberies they were generally left unharmed. Unfortunately a trend of violence has emerged where cooperation is no longer a guarantee of safety. Residential theft can be deterred, though not completely eliminated, with the addition of metal grills on windows and doors and extensive exterior lighting and perimeter fences and/or walls. Vehicle thefts, especially involving new or expensive models, remain a problem and caution must be exercised when leaving vehicles unattended.

1B. Safety: Road conditions and road hazards

Road conditions are average to poor. The primary highways ) Northern, Western, Southern, and Hummingbird Highways are in generally good condition once away from Belize City. Close to Belize City the road conditions are very poor. There are no lighted highways, no shoulder, and driving can be very dangerous, especially after dusk and during the frequent rains.

Hazards are many and frequent as pedestrians, bicycles, and animals use the highways for traffic, and stopped or unlit vehicles create a very real hazard. Heavy trucks and buses

make frequent and unexpected stops along the highway and poor driving practices, to include vehicles passing on curves, blind spots and hills contribute to a high vehicular accident rate.

## 12. (U) Political Violence

### 1A. Historical Perspective

Political violence is almost nonexistent in Belize. February 2008 Belize General Election marked a major turnover in government. The transition from one party to another proved very peaceful. Early 2007 saw several political protests, and one that had begun peacefully turned violent when a criminal element used the protest as an opportunity for initiating a riot. The 2008 General Elections proved once again that Belize adheres to democratic principles.

### 1B. Regional Terrorism and Organized Crime

Organized crime still remains an issue with money laundering, stolen vehicles, human smuggling and trafficking and the drug trade beyond the ability of the police to address effectively. There is some recent indication of a growing presence of gangs in Belize. In November 2007, reports of Mara Salvatrucha gangs (MS-13 and MS-18) indicate a stronger base of operations than previously known.

### 1C. International Terrorism and Transnational Terrorism

While there does not appear to be any links to Middle Eastern terrorist groups currently active in Belize at this time, minimal immigration controls, the theft of passports and the ease with which documents can be obtained make the country a potential transit point for transnational terrorists.

### 1D. Civil Unrest

Demonstrations in Belize are generally peaceful. However for a week in late January and early February 2009, a protest by cane farmers against Belize Sugar Industries in Orange Walk (approximately 120 miles north of Belmopan) turned violent. Approximately 1000 protesters successfully shut down the Northern Highway, effectively severing the northern districts from the remainder of the country and disrupting the main artery of vehicular traffic, commerce and trade with Mexico. On 02/02/2009, the demonstration culminated in a violent clash between Belize Police Department (BPD) units and protestors resulted in the death of one protester and injuries to two BPD officers and eight protesters.

## 13. (U) Post-Specific Concerns

### 1A. Environmental, such as earthquakes and floods

The most likely and most feared natural disaster is a hurricane. Between the months of June and November, it is hurricane season in the Western Caribbean, with the September and October period as the most likely time for tropical storms and hurricanes. Belize has almost no capability to respond to such a disaster, and the vulnerability is well known. Although the Belize National Emergency Management Office (NEMO) has analyzed the country's vulnerability to a hurricane, no systemic actions have been taken in response to these reports. Hurricane shelters exist along the coast line, but food and water supplies are either non-existent or inadequate. Waterways require dredging, so flooding will be exacerbated. Belize has no evacuation plan.

In 1961, damage from the Category 5 Hurricane Hattie precipitated the inland of Belize's capital from vulnerable Belize City to Belmopan. The continuous threat of tropical storms and hurricanes was a primary reason for the move of the U.S. Embassy into a new facility in November 2006.

While Belize is tropical and has regular rainfall, clogged drainage and waterways combined with urban growth lead to frequent flooding of roadways, even during the &dry8

season. The rainy season typically last from June to November and heavy rains can cause flooding at any time during this period. Hurricanes and tropical depressions can and do cause severe flooding throughout Belize. In June 2008, Tropical Depression Arthur caused severe flooding resulting in 10 deaths, total destruction to the Kendall Bridge in Stann Creek District, and effectively severing access to Southern portions of the country. Tropical Depression 16 in October 2008 resulted in over 30 villages countrywide being declared disaster areas and millions of dollars of crop damage. Moreover, extensive road damage is still evident in places on all the major highways and in some areas is still under repair.

Two category 5 hurricanes ) Felix (September 2007) and Dean (August 2007) ) caused extensive damage throughout the entire country, although a greater humanitarian disaster was averted as Belize City was spared from a direct hit. These major storms have resulted in extensive U.S. Government and international assistance rendered aid to assist the Government of Belize in recovery efforts.

Minor earthquakes have occurred in Belize, notably in Southern portion of the country. There is no record of a sever earthquake in modern times. There are no active volcanoes in Belize. There is a risk for forest fires at the end of the dry season, Typically around April and May.

#### B. Industrial and Transportation Accidents

N/A

#### C. Kidnappings

To date, Belize is the only country in Central America to have no kidnapping of tourists or foreigners for ransom.

#### D. Drugs and Narco-terrorism

The porous borders with Mexico and Guatemala contribute to Belize's status as a transit point for the continued trafficking of narcotics and money laundering. Recent events in Mexico are worth monitoring to determine what impact, if any, law enforcement activity will have on the cartels and the potential ramifications for narcotics related criminal activity in Belize.

#### 4. (U) Police Response

While the Belize Police Department remains supportive and responsive to requests for security assistance and investigations, their ability to respond and deter crimes is very limited. Unfortunately chronic staffing, equipment and administrative deficiencies undermine the ability of BPD to quickly respond and provide a comprehensive investigation. For example issues such as vehicle shortages or continuously busy general police and emergency telephone lines, make even the timely resolution of routine issues problematic.

##### A. How to handle incidents of police harassment or detention

Police are very cooperative with the Embassy regarding Americans who are arrested or detained, and always inform the Embassy. Any American citizen who feels he is being harassed should contact the Consular Section at the U.S. Embassy in Belmopan. The Consular Section and Consular Wardens maintain a list of attorneys in their respective areas. Local attorneys will charge based upon the magnitude of the case.

##### B. Where to turn for assistance if you become a victim of a crime

Belize City Police Department tel: 227-2222,  
San Pedro Police Station tel: 226-2022,  
San Ignacio Police Station tel: 824-2022,  
Punta Gorda Police Station tel: 722-2022  
Orange Walk Police Station tel: 223-2022  
Independence Police Station tel: 523-2022

Dangriga Police Station tel: 522-2022  
Corozal Police Station tel: 422-2022  
Caye Caulker Police Station tel: 226-2022  
Benque Viejo Police Station tel: 823-2038  
Belmopan Police Station tel: 822-2222

#### 15. (U) Medical Emergencies

##### 1A. Contact information for local hospitals and clinics

There are 10 hospitals located in Belize. All medical clinics see only outpatient cases and are not staffed to handle emergencies. Therefore there are no organized medical "clinics" within Belize. Belize City is the center for medical care in Belize. The two major hospitals equipped to handle serious medical problems are located in Belize City: Belize Medical Associates and Karl Heusner Memorial Hospital in Belize City. Karl Heusner Memorial Hospital is adequate for many serious problems, but the blood supply is not screened for Hepatitis C. On two separate occasions, infected blood is known to have caused Hepatitis C infections. Medical facilities outside Belize City, even in Belmopan, are not adequate to handle serious medical conditions, such as cardiac problems, and often fail to meet basic standards.

Belize Medical Associates (5791 St. Thomas Street, Kings Park, tel. 223-0303)

Karl Heusner Memorial Hospital in Belize City (Princess Margaret Dr., tel. 223-1548).

##### 1B. Air ambulance services

Those with serious or life-threatening problems who need medevac should contact Air Ambulance. Medical expenses in Belize can become costly. It is important a few weeks prior to traveling to Belize to check that you have sufficient coverage with your insurance company. You should bring prescription drugs you will need with you. There are reasonably well-stocked pharmacies in most major towns and tourist destinations.

Air Ambulance Professionals (Ft. Lauderdale Executive Airport, Hanger 36B 1535 S. Perimeter Rd., Ft. Lauderdale, FL 33309, tel: 800-752-4195; 954-491-0555, [www.airambulanceprof.com](http://www.airambulanceprof.com)).

#### 16. (U) Travel precautions: Tips on how to avoid becoming a victim

##### 1A. Alert our constituents to any crimes/scams that are unique or especially frequent in your region.

There are no crimes/scams that are unique to Belize. Caution should be exercised, as always, when using ATM machines or in the use of credit cards.

##### 1B. Include any area of town to be avoided and best security practices.

###### Areas to Avoid

Almost half the murders in Belize in 2008 occurred in Belize City, with the overwhelming majority of those occurring in the south/west side of Belize City. Overall, crime in Belize City is at a substantially higher rate than the rest of the country. The city itself is relatively small and neighborhoods of different qualities are close to each other without the buffer zones typically found in larger cities that might separate higher crime areas from others. Generally speaking, it is strongly recommended that the area of Belize City south/west of the Belize River should not be visited, particularly at night or while alone.

###### Best Security Practices - Personal Security

Maintain a low profile - Do not advertise the fact that you

are American. Dress casually, keep valuables out of sight, and do not draw attention to yourself with your actions.

Vary your routine - Be unpredictable in your movements; vary your routes from home to the office as well as your departure and arrival times.

Be alert to possible surveillance - Note any individual who appears out of place along your routes to regularly scheduled activities, such as going from home to office.

Be alert to your surroundings - Minimize valuables and do not carry large sums of money. Be aware of potential scams and robbery tactics used to distract your attention.

Avoid wearing jewelry and carry a clutch purse or a neck purse instead of a shoulder bag. Carry a wallet in the front trouser pocket or front jacket pocket.

Never leave shopping bags or merchandise unattended.

When hiring domestic help, thoroughly check their references to the greatest extent that you can. Ensure that they are trained not to volunteer information to strangers or to allow access of workers without prior authorization.

#### Best Security Practices - Protecting Your Vehicle

Spare tire - If your tire is mounted on the outside of the vehicle, secure it in place with chain and padlock, or similar device. If this is not possible, remove the spare tire and keep it at home, reinstalling it only for extended trips outside the city.

Items inside the vehicle - Theft of small, easily pilfered items is a common crime, as is the theft of car sound systems. The installation of a car alarm is strongly recommended. If you purchase a car radio, look for models that can be removed from the dash and locked in the trunk. Also, keep your vehicle sterile, storing anything that would entice a thief out of plain view.

Locking hubs - Replace one lug nut on each wheel with a specially keyed bolt that locks or can only be removed with a special attachment to the tire iron.

Parking - Parking on the street can rarely be avoided. If left overnight, ensure you park in a well lit area, with security guards (most hotels have security guards). At the very least, attempt to park within view of the location of your visit.

Car Alarm - As previously mentioned, installation of a car alarm is a necessary precaution in deterring vehicle thefts and thefts of interior contents.

#### Best Security Practices - Road Travel Precautions

Prior to road travel, ensure that your vehicle is good operating condition, paying particular attention to the engine, tires, brakes, head and tail lights, spare tire and jack, horn, seat belts and fluid levels. Particularly on trips to remote areas, try to travel in tandem with other vehicles, and advise someone of your travel plans, including anticipated arrival and departure times and contact numbers.

The following items are recommended for extended road trips:

- Cellular telephone with charger (although some areas between cities lack coverage);
- A spare tire;
- Potable water;
- Non-perishable food items;
- First Aid kit;
- Fire extinguisher;
- Emergency tool kit with the following:
- Flashlight and additional batteries;
- Battery operated radio;

- Extra fan belt/drive belt;
- Extra fuses, spark plugs, and light bulbs;
- Duplicate ignition key;
- Screw driver (regular and Phillips head);
- Socket wrench set;
- Pliers;
- Wire;
- Electrical tape;
- Jumper cables;
- Compressed air tire pump;
- Flares/reflectors

17. (U) Further information: How to Contact the U.S. Embassy

The Embassy is located at 4 Floral Park Road, Belmopan, Cayo, Belize; the Embassy is open for regular business Monday through Friday, 8:00 am to 12:00 pm and 1:00 pm to 5:00 pm. The Embassy is closed on American and Belizean holidays. Americans are encouraged to register with the American Citizens Service Office.

1A. Embassy contact numbers

Embassy Main phone number: 501-822-4011  
Regional Security Office: 501-822-4011 ext 4105/4007  
Political/Economic Section: 501-822-4011 ext 4197  
Embassy Nurse: 501-822-4011 ext 4286  
Consular Section: 501-822-4011 ext 4219/4209

18. (U) OSAC Country Council

OSAC had its first meeting July 2007. Interested parties can visit the Belize Country Council website at [belize.osac.gov](http://belize.osac.gov).

1A. Point of contact

Robert F. Kelty, Regional Security Officer at 501-822-4011 ext 4105/4007 or email [DS\\_RSO\\_Belmopan@state.gov](mailto:DS_RSO_Belmopan@state.gov).

DIFFILY